WASH POST 24 Aug 67
Approved For Release 2006/01/30 : CIA-RDP70B00338R000300100066-2

Soviet Navy Is Developing As Global Strategic Force

By Andrew Wilson
London Observer

LONDON — Barely noticed in the West, a development has been taking place in high-level Soviet defense thinking which may yet be rated one of the decisive events of this decade.

It is the transformation of the Soviet Navy from its traditional role of a mere auxiliary to Soviet land power to that of a global strategic force on a level with land-based missile forces.

That the Soviet Union was placing a high value on naval development became clear in recent years through the big expansion of its submarine fleet, and merchant marine.

Soviet warship tonnage is now second only to that of the United States, and an unusually high proportion of it is in active commission. The Soviets have 400 submarines, of which 50 are nuclear-powered, and about five nuclear submarines are being added each year.

About 40 of these submarines are designed to fire ballistic missiles, although they carry fewer missiles than U.S. Polaris submarines. Another 40 can fire shorter range electronically guided "cruise" missiles.

While there are no Soviet aircraft carriers, a land-based naval air arm includes 500 bombers with unrefueled ranges of up to 3800 miles.

The decisions for naval expansion were recently made public by the Soviet naval Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Gortchkov, and his deputy, Admiral Kasatonov.

Gortchkov's account has appeared in the Soviet journal Morskoi Sbornik (Maritime Symposium) and in the English-language Soviet Military Review. He says Soviet naval expansion was prompted by the enlargement of British and American sea power in the decade after World War II.

In the mid-1950s, according to Gortchkov, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party authorized construction of "an ocean-going navy capable of carrying out offensive tasks of a strategic nature." In this navy, submarines and aircraft, armed with missiles and nuclear weapons, were to play a leading part.

A result of this decision, it appears, was the planning of a force of Polaris-type submarines with a "deterrent" role. This is thought to be the Blue Belt defense system announced by the late Soviet Defense Minister, Marshal Malinovsky, last year.

Another result was the development of a Soviet capacity to engage in limited war.

The Soviet Union has undoubtedly been moved in this field by envy of the Americans, who have made great use of long-range amphibious forces to further foreign policy objectives, both in the Mediterranean and in the Far East.

Gortchkov lays special emphasis on combined operations. His article is illustrated by a picture of Soviet tank-landing ships in operation. He also refers to the newly formed Soviet "Marine Corps."

The question now arises How does the Soviet Union intend to employ this new capability? The answer goes far beyond purely naval matters For Soviet strategic thinking apparently is undergoing a change as profound as that in America in the late 1950s when military leaders drew attention to the weakness of an "all-or-nothing" strategy of massive retaliation.

The American doctrine of "flexible response," which replaced "massive retaliation" also appears to have attractions for the Soviet Union. It embraces the capacity to fight not only limited conventional wars, but also "limited" types of nuclear war.

On the face of it, the Soviet developments are still defensive and pose no direct threat to Western security. But the dropping of the former Soviet theory that "escalation is automatic" is bound to change the strategic framework within which Soviet and Western aims clash.

The main conclusion to be drawn is that if Soviet planning continues on the lines indicated by Gortchkov, America cannot indefinitely deploy, unchallenged, the type of military force it now disposes in Vietnam.

Approved For Release 2006/01/30 : CIA-RDP70B00338R000300100066-2